

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
REMARKS, WITH GENERAL JOHN SHALIKASHVILI, EN ROUTE TO AVIANO, ITALY
FEBRUARY 19, 1994

SECRETARY PERRY: Let me describe, first of all, why we're going on this trip and what we hope to accomplish with it. We're going to have a meeting with five NATO ministers of defense and chiefs of defense. This will include all of the countries that would be involved in the airstrikes if there were to be airstrikes. The meeting is going to start off with General Joulwan and Admiral Boorda wearing their NATO hats, describing to us first of all their operational readiness for this mission. Secondly, their rules of engagement, a very important aspect of what we're doing here. Third, what plans have already been made for coordinating between our NATO air units and the UNPROFOR ground forces that are down there.

This is a highly unusual situation where there's one command running the air force and another command on the ground. Now we know that there have been extensive exercises and extensive training between these two units over the last number of months. Nevertheless, we want to get briefed on how that coordination has worked out in the judgment of the operational commanders who are going to be exercising this.

That's the first set of activities we'll be involved with. Secondly, we will be discussing among ourselves, the ministers, the chiefs of staff, contingency plans. This is the "what ifs." What if things go this way instead of that way, what should the next response be. There will be a rather fulsome discussion of the contingency planning.

Third, General Shali and I would like to meet separately with the American pilots who may be called upon to go on these missions. Part of that meeting you will be able to attend if you want, but part of it we plan to have a private meeting with these pilots. We want to bring them the message from their Chairman and their Secretary of Defense and from the President, why we're asking them to go into harm's way on this mission. They have a right to know that and to hear that directly from us.

After the meeting, I will call President Clinton and report to him on what transpired at the meeting. I will call Secretary Woerner, secretary general of NATO, and report to him. Then I will call several defense ministers who have forces on the ground there, but are not involved in the airstrikes. Minister Grachev, for example, I've been in close communication with him, and I think it's very important to maintain that close contact. I mention parenthetically that I talked to him a few days ago and sought his cooperation in trying to influence the Serbs to move their artillery back so that we would not have to -- because we both, both we and the Russians, have a common objective of not having to conduct this bombing exercise. I'll also call my colleague in Canada, the defense minister there, who has forces on the ground who will not be involved in the airstrikes. Now, that sums up what I plan to do tomorrow and with that opening statement, I'll take questions.

Q. Mr. Secretary, why this high profile meeting just hours before the deadline? Why not by telephone? Is it sending a message in addition to speaking to U.S. pilots. . .

SECRETARY PERRY: This is not instead of those consultations; this is in addition to. I've been back and forth on -- I've been in touch by telephone with all of these ministers numerous times ever since we made the decision. In fact, before we made the decision, the day before the NAC meeting, I've been in touch with all of these ministers. We've been back and forth on the phone almost every day. This is a coalition operation, a coalition under NATO. It's a very difficult operation, a complex operation in some ways, and we have to be very, very sure we are together on what we're trying to accomplish and how we're going to accomplish it. And we agreed talking by phone a few days ago that in addition to these telephonic conversations, we needed a face-to-face meeting. In addition to the meeting among the ministers, they have some of the same desire that I have to be able to meet with and talk to the pilots who are going to be carrying out the mission.

Q. Have both you and the Chairman been assured by General Joulwan and Admiral Boorda that this can in fact be accomplished even though it's a difficult thing to do?

GENERAL SHALI: Yes. I think from a military point of view the operation is certainly executable and we've been assured by both those commanders that they are totally prepared to carry it out.

Q. Can you hit what you can't see? We've been hearing there's cloud cover 70% of the day, and when we were asking the question on Friday, what are the Serbs doing, the answers was, well we really can't see. There's too much cloud cover. So what happens if these strikes go and we've got all this cloud cover?

GENERAL SHALI: Certainly it's up to the operational commander to pick the time and place of engagement. I'm very confident that Admiral Boorda has the right instructions to the pilots that avoiding collateral damage is one of the highest considerations and that those instructions have been issued to the pilots. So I think when to strike and under what conditions is an operational commander's responsibility. I think he will pick the time and place when he can assure himself that he can hit the target with minimum collateral damage.

Q. ...weather it could be days. Right?

GENERAL SHALI: It certainly could be.

SECRETARY PERRY: One point though. You don't have to see a target with your eyes. We have radars over there. We have very high quality radars both in surveillance aircraft and in strike aircraft. One of the primary reasons for sending the F15 Eagle over there to supplement the force is it's equipped not only with the very high quality optical sighting equipment, but high quality radar detection. What the Chairman says is exactly correct. The operational commander will decide the time and the place based on a whole set of factors including weather.

Q. Mr. Secretary, you said the other day you're cautiously optimistic. Do you see that the armaments are being removed and are you continuously optimistic that this perhaps won't come to a strike?

SECRETARY PERRY: I can't add to what I said yesterday on that. We are watching, as you can imagine, on an hour-to-hour basis, all of the reports we're getting from that and we'll be watching them right up until the deadline.

Q. Can you give us what the latest assessment is? I mean, what your most recent information is?

SECRETARY PERRY: The latest assessment, without putting numbers on it, is there have been a lot, a lot of artillery and tanks moved, either out of the area or into cantonments, but as of this moment, right up to this hour, there is still a lot left.

Q. Two weeks ago in Munich, you said, "If air strikes are Act One in this melodrama, what is Act Two? What is Act Three?" Could you answer that question for us now?

SECRETARY PERRY: Let me put two different comments on that. The first is that, at the time in Munich, people were talking about...I was talking about, generalized airstrikes, comprehensive airstrikes all over Bosnia. That would have had profound, a set of profound consequences and Act Two is almost impossible to describe because you cannot imagine all the consequences that could come from that. We are talking about a very, very selective use of air power here for the precise purpose of stopping the slaughter in Sarajevo while the peace negotiations go on. Now to get to your question, what about Act Two? That's this whole set of contingencies we will be discussing among ourselves tomorrow. The contingencies...the whole set of military contingencies which we have prepared and which the British and French have looked at too will all be measured, by my judgment, by two criteria. First of all is they accelerate towards the peace process and, secondly, they reduce civilian casualties and slaughter while that's going on. Those are precisely the criteria we used for deciding on this course of action, any follow on course of action would be measured by those same two yardsticks.

Q. Does the presence of Russian troops present a problem in terms of the possibility of hitting them or if they get in the way or purposely get in the way?

SECRETARY PERRY: Russian troops will be under the command of General Rose. They will be under the UNPROFOR command. They will be just like the other troops that are there. We have as much concern. That's why it is so important that we have the coordination with UNPROFOR. Obviously it would be a disaster if we would hit U.N. forces on the ground. But the fact that they are Russian instead of Ukrainian or instead of Belgian isn't a critical issue as long as the Russian forces are under UNPROFOR, our concern for their protection is that same as our concern for any other UNPROFOR forces.

Q. Is there any concern that they might not continue under UNPROFOR?

SECRETARY PERRY: No.

Q. Mr. Secretary, I have a question about the mind set of the allies going into this. Are you looking for an excuse to hit targets that may be left there and accessible or are you looking, more or less, to say there's been substantial compliance, there's no threat to...

SECRETARY PERRY: That's an easy question to answer. Each one of the ministers going into that meeting, each one of the chiefs of staff going into that meeting want to avoid airstrikes if we can. If we can stop the slaughter in Sarajevo without airstrikes, that's what we want to do. The second point I'd make is that each one of the ministers is going into that meeting with a sense of resolve that we are going to stop that slaughter.

Q. What about moving this action to other areas?

SECRETARY PERRY: I may be able to talk about that on the way back...

Q. Thank you.

Q. Have you been told the number of Russians that are going, Mr. Secretary...400 or 800?

SECRETARY PERRY: We've heard 400 but I really can't confirm anything.

Q. One of our stories had 800, that's why I was wondering.

GENERAL SHALI: What we have heard was 400. . .

Q. Inaudible weather question.

GENERAL SHALI: I think that it can always break, but right now all indications are that the weather will continue to be bad at least through tomorrow.

Q. Will that be a problem for the air forces over there? What's the risk of bad weather, accidents, ground fire?

GENERAL SHALI: Obviously, it would reduce visibility if you're relying on radar as opposed to visual identification of what's there. As the Secretary said, while we have extraordinarily sophisticated aircraft that we have sent over there to be able to do that, you would like to have good weather so you can also have eyeballs on the target. It certainly does not exclude the possibility for accomplishing the mission.

Q. Mr. Chairman, what it is your commanders Joulwan and Boorda have assured you they can do in terms of achieving the mission? Have they said that they can prevent the Serbs from shelling -- what is it they've said they can do when you say the mission is doable?

GENERAL SHALI: The mission is not to prevent shelling. Their mission is to attempt to enforce the dictum of the NAC which said that after the deadline, any heavy weapons that remain inside the 20 kilometer circle that are not under U.N. control are subject to be subjected to airstrikes.

Q. Have they said they can hit any weapons that are left in that area?

GENERAL SHALI: They are confident that any weapon that they can see, they can hit.

Q. Will NATO accept an ambiguous end to this ultimatum? I mean, let's say 7:00 tomorrow and you're still not quite sure, there's still perhaps some weapons in there. Is that good enough?

GENERAL SHALI: I think the answer is very clear that the statement has been that any weapons remaining after the deadline within the 20 kilometer circle that are not under U.N. control are subject to airstrikes. Any. It didn't say 90%. It didn't say 26 -- whatever. It said "any" weapons.

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